East Orange Resident Writes Reactions To Involvement in Orange County Fires

By Janet Stephens
Special to the Rancho Reporter

How does it feel to spend an agonizing, unending night fearfully awaiting word as to whether or not you will be forced to leave behind your home and all your worldly possessions, including sentimental treasures it took a lifetime to accumulate?

How does it feel to see the homes and animals of your friends destroyed by relentless flames that viciously devoured everything in their path?

How do you console people as they stare hopelessly at the spot where their house once stood and where nothing remains but ashes and embers.

The crackle of flames, the ruthless roar of the wind, the sickening thud of a roof collapsing, the tinkle of breaking glass, the never-ceasing scream of sirens and the rumble of heavy equipment rushing help to stricken areas--these sounds can never be erased from the minds of Orange County residents who suffered through the nightmare experienced here last week.

Monday morning this reporter was awakened by sirens. The smell of smoke was strong. In a matter of moments we knew what was happening. Thoughts began to crowd my mind: 'What do you take? Where is the fire now? Who do we know who may already be affected and needs help? What can we do?

I looked out the back window and could see the yellow flames in the distance licking their forked tongues high into the air, always at a crazy, unreal angle that lets you know how hard the wind was blowing. A tree sprawled helplessly across the back yard. It looked as futile as I felt.

As we continued to wait the radio kept barking out the "progress"of the fire. The news came that the schools had been closed and evacuation centers set up.

While we watched huge clouds of black smoke belched skyward as tanker planes dropped their loads. Then word came that the planes had been grounded because of the 70 m.p.h. winds. I got a sick feeling in my stomach and wondered to myself, "Will they ever be able to control it? Will it burn all the way to the sea?"

All nature seemed to be striking out in cynical pleasure at the futility of mankind. The relentless wind, the blistering, suffocating, stifling heat that seemed endless, the dense, engulfing smoke that choked and blinded firemen in their courageous struggle against the fire and the elements--all seemed to mock our helplessness.

We frantically sought the whereabouts of another couple we knew were in the path of the fire.

We finally learned that they had tired desperately to save their beautiful home by wetting it down with hoses. As they worked their car was set in motion by a savage gust of wind and a gentle, courageous lady, blinded by smoke and desperation, was crushed to death. Their house burned and was a total loss.

As the day wore on and into the night we could see the huge black cloud hovering where the fire had passed and the golden glow creeping on and on like a giant serpent whose appetite could not be satisfied.

When the fire passed where we were I felt relieved . Then I felt guilty for being relieved and thought of the people farther along who were still in danger.

It seemed it would never end -- but somehow it did. At least the fire was controled. But I think the horror, tragedy and heartbreak may never really end.

How do you estimate the loss caused by such an inferno? Surely not in dollars and cents, though property damage ran into millions. Thousands upon thousands of acres of valuable water shed were destroyed and many cattle, horses and wild animals were lost.

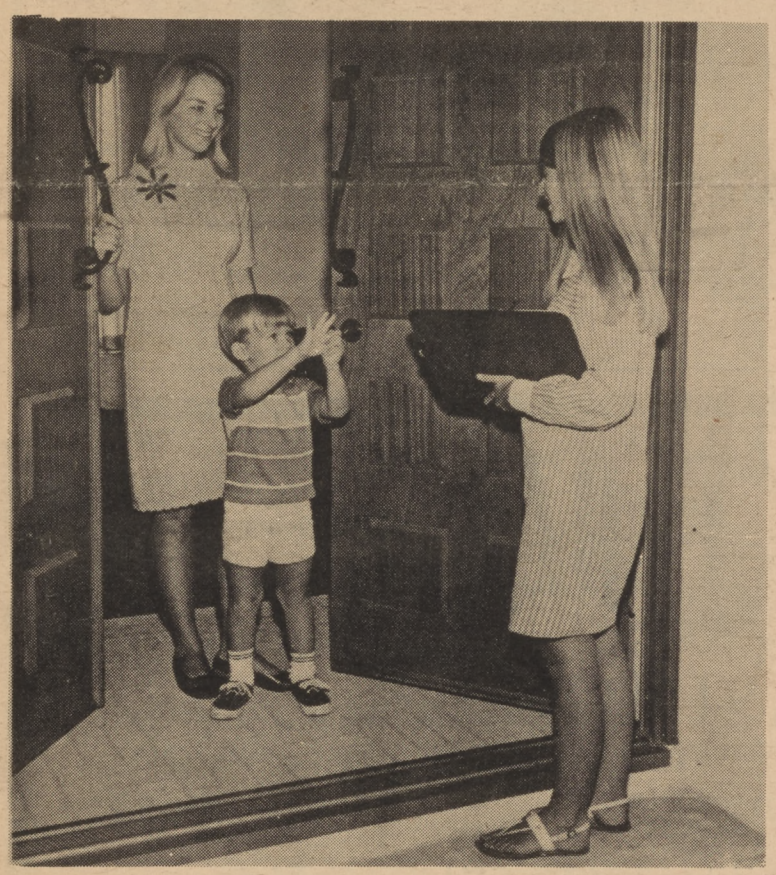
How do you put a price tag on a lost life, a broken heart?

How do we recover?

Maybe time and God can help!

The Rancho Reporter

Vol. 1, No. 51 "To inform and serve..." Wednesday, November 8, 1967



COUNTING MISSION VIEJO NOSES--Telling Mission Viejo census taker Emmie Bigelow that he is just three years old is little Tom Spratt, one of the newest residents of Mission Viejo. His mother, Mrs. Thomas Spratt, waits to supply the other answers in the census which will determine whether the population of the not-quite-two-year-old community is closer to 3,000 or 4,000. Members of the Mission Viejo Youth Club are doing the interviewing, earning funds for their ambitious charitable works program.

UCI Studies Future of Local Cities

Investigating possible means of saving Orange County's downtown areas from oblivion will be a major task of a UCI-Project 21 study team which held its first meeting on the Irvine Campus this week.

Twenty people involved in public and private planning efforts joined in the Study Team on Downtown Areas under the leadership of Arthur B. Gallion, former dean of the U.S.C. School of Architecture.

Gallion told the group that nearly all cities in Orange County have central core areas in various stages of deterioration.

Among the questions to be considered by the team will be the future anticipated functions of downtown cores, desirable means of stemming physical and economic deterioration of these areas and possible planning policies for land use to develop downtown cores, Gallion said.

"I have a sentimental feeling about downtown," said Gallion. "To me, the downtown represents the beginning of a city. It has historical impact."

Gallion asked if our economy is "once again gearing itself to waste"in neglecting the downtown core.

"We have planned obsolescence, but no means of disposing of the resulting waste," said Gallion.

News Briefs

THE EL TORO WOMAN'S CLUB met yesterday afternoon at the home of Mrs. Frances Bennett where the group heard a book review by Mrs. Merle Ramsey on the book written by Mrs. Ramsey and her husband entitled "Pioneer Days of Laguna Beach." Co-hostesses for the meeting were Mrs. Maybell Whisler and Mrs. Pearl Jones. Mrs. Joanne Prothero is president of the El Toro Woman's Club.

LOCAL RESIDENTS ARE INVITED to attend the performance of the Leisure World Chorale Tuesday, November 14, at 8:30 p.m. at the Mission Viejo High School. Sponsoring the event is the Mission Viejo Women's Club. No admission will be charged according to Mrs. Diane Huffman, chairman, who may be contacted at 837-7705.

SOUTHERN ORANGE COUNTY ALUMNAE ASSN. OF KAPPA KAPPA GAMMA will hold their November meeting tomorrow night at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Mrs. Frank Fiorentino, 1206 Estelle Lane, Newport Beach. The program will be "Christmas Decorative Art." presented by Bob Riehl. For more information call Mrs. William Slater at 837-7875.

SADDLEBACK JUNIOR COLLEGE DISTRICT submitted the college's ten year plan to the State Department of Education last week The plan was submitted to the State on November 1 in order to qualify for state funds for the year 1969-70 under the new Junior College construction act. Roy N. Barletta, business manager for the JC district, presented the project in four phases to the board of trustees of the district at last week's regular meeting.

Cheaper by Dozen

Golfing is cheaper by the dozen at the Mission Viejo Golf Course during the fall and winter, according to head golf pro Ed Wampler. A group of three or more foursomes coming in on any weekday, will be charged only $12 per twosome for carts and green fees, a saving of $3.

Master Plan Under Consideration By San Joaquin Schools

"A Master Plan" for the San Joaquin School District was one of the items on a packed agenda for the board of trustees at their regular monthly meeting last week, held at the central administrative offices off the San Canyon Road.

Superintendent Ralph A. Gates also reported to the Board of Trustees that students and staff will be moving into the O'Neill School in Mission Viejo at the end of the month.

Plans were also discussed for the construction of School No.8 to be constructed in the La Paz tract in Mission Viejo. Approval of payment of warrants were also given at the meeting.

Local Ski Club Sponsors Film

The recently formed local ski called "Esquiar" will meet on Tuesday, November 14 at 6:30 p.m. at the Mission Viejo Town Hall in La Paz Plaza for a business meeting and to see a ski movie.

According to Ted Witt, president of the local ski club, the film to be shown is entitled "Ski Western America" and will feature Taos, New Mexico; Jackson Hole, Wyoming and Aspen, Colorado. Interested residents are invited to attend the meeting. For more information on the ski club, Witt may be reached at 638-5930.

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Meet Your Neighbor

Gratian Bidart

A colorful El Toro rancher with cowboy boots, a pick-up truck and a ready smile is Gratian Bidart who lives with his wife and three daughters in a ranch house estimated to be around 100 years old, located on the Moulton Ranch at 24231, Highway 101, El Toro.

Bidart, who is of French-Basque decent, was born in the area and worked, as a youngster, with his father on the Irvine Ranch running sheep. At the present time Bidart runs sheep and cattle on the ranch he presently leases from three different large land owners.

His wife, Yvonne Bidart, was a La Puente resident, until she married Bidart in 1951. The three daughters include Joann, 14; Debbie, 10 and Grace, seven.

Bidart attended the old El Toro elementary school in El Toro, then the old Mission Elementary School in Capistrano, before completing his formal education at Tustin High School.

Bidart served on the board of trustees of the old El Toro School district and is presently a board member of the San Joaquin School District. He has served, with broken tenure, on these two boards for the past ten years.

He has also been a member of the Elks Club in Santa Ana since 1952; is presently on the Board of Directors of the Rotary in Laguna Hills and is on the Council of the St. Nicholas Church. He has been an active member with El Toro Volunteer Fire Department since 1952 and is a member of the California Republican Assembly.

Bidart's father was born here and then later returned to Europe to get married and then again returned to his work on the Irvine Ranch. Bidart was born while his father was an employee of the Irvine Ranch. Bidart said this week that he has lived a full and interesting life in the El Toro--Irvine area.

This space sponsored by the Toro Disposal Service, Charles Waltman, owner.

Auld Returns To Agency

Stephen C. Auld has returned to Vineyard Advertising, Inc., Tustin and Honolulu, as executive vice president and creative director after a two-year absence, it was announced this week by Howard Vineyard, president.

During his absence from the agency, Auld served as marketing director for Republic Homes, Costa Mesa developer with current projects throughout Southern California. Republic Homes is one of the Vineyard accounts Auld will supervise.

Prior to joining Vineyard in 1963, Auld operated his own advertising agency in Los Angeles for two years. Earlier, he had been with Capitol Records, Inc. for six years, starting as production manager and winding up as director of advertising, a position he held for two years.

Born in Texas and raised in California, Auld, who is married and has two children, lives at 472 62nd St., Newport Beach.

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Ann Noel

DIABLO DAZE ...

Mission Viejo Hi Talk

"Christmas Snow and Mistletoe" will be the theme of Mission's second annual Christmas formal, now only four weeks away. Sponsored by Girls' League, this is a girl-ask-boy-affair.

Decor will be centered on a romantic nineteenth century theme. The ceiling will be camoflouged with white billows from parachutes tacked on. A long tunnel with mistletoe promises to add excitement to the evening.

Mission appears to be fast turning into a vending business. The ASB will be selling fresh donuts at both lunches November 28 and 30. The Senior Class will be pushing their candy canes again come December.

Pep Club members have been selling pep ribbons all football season. Starting with Basketball season, this organization will offer to the student body small pom poms to wave the Diablo team on to victory at all the games.

Science Club will be selling See's suckers as soon as their order arrives.

Add to this list Mission decals which are again going for 50c. Plus, the El Viejo, Mission's yearbook, is still on sale for late buyers.

The Science Club will soon trek up the hills to the Mount Wilson observatory on a field trip open to all Diablos. Planned for Saturday, November 18, the expedition promises to be a rewarding one. No fixed price for the trip has been set as yet,however, a discount will be given to Science Club members.

The roles of star football player and cheerleader will be reversed, November 22, when the girls take over the football team and the boys the cheering. Scheduled for the pep assembly that day, the "Foba" game or powder puff football will pit the seniors against the underclassmen.

Any interested potential football "great" can sign up and play if she comes to the three practices after school, to be announced.

Mission Viejo Student Dies

Gary Rosencrans, 15 year old Mission Viejo High School athlete, died last week at the St. Joseph Community Hospital following an automobile accident. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Rosencrans. Funeral arrangements are being handled by the MacDougall Mortuary.

Coots Wins Toastmaster Contest

Peter E. Coots of Mission Viejo was recently voted "Best Speaker" of the evening at the Saddleback Toastmasters Club.

Saddleback Toastmasters Club is a newly organized club whose members are interested in developing speaking skills that will benefit them in business, community and social life.

Meetings are held each Monday, at 6:45 p.m., in the TV Studio Building of the new Mission Viejo High School.

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El Toro Community Hall
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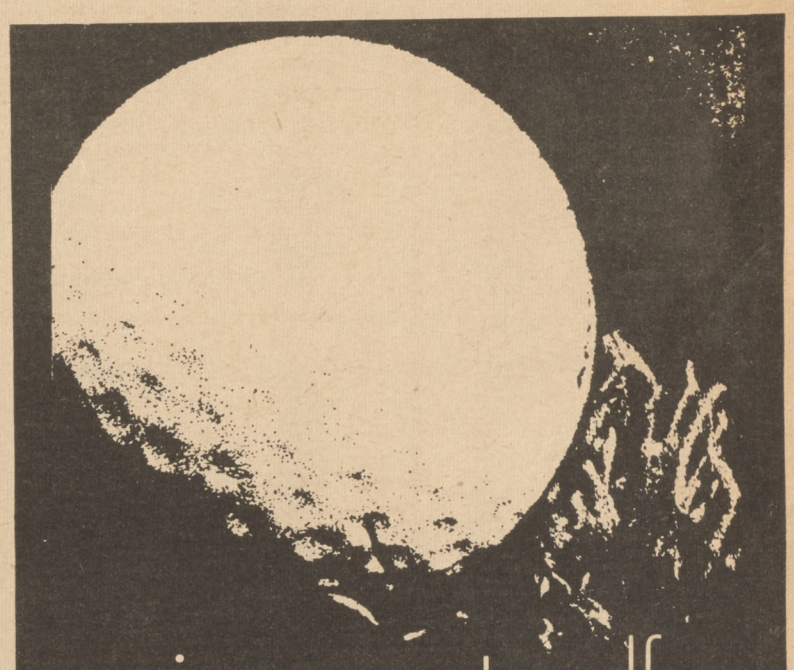

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News: 837-6500
Advertising: 837-6501 or 544-1532

The official newspaper serving the El Toro, Irvine, East Irvine, Laguna Hills, Mission Viejo, and University Park area. Published every Wednesday.

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